

The reflections in this booklet can be summed up by Ubuntu, the African philosophy of 'Oneness'. Ubuntu - "I am because we are". In other words, a person is a person through other people. This African philosophy reminds us that we are all interconnected. It simply means we are all one family. The Ubuntu philosophy believes in group solidarity, synergy, our interconnectedness, common humanity and our responsibility for each other. We are all part of this circle of love, compassion and life which our foundress Mary Ward cherished. We are being connected to each other by our common heritage and humanity.

Oneness becomes our powerful tool for evangelisation: as one of the African proverbs says, "One finger cannot pick up a grain." Oneness is the prayer of Jesus for us, (John 17:23), oneness will raise our mission to a higher plane. Ubuntu is what God presses us on to, to be one, to make music together, to break the walls down, to build the body up and to bring hope to people and set the world on fire.

Ubuntu calls us to mirror our humanity for each other, love to truly hold each other and courage and confidence to truly support each other. Ubuntu is the spirit of participation, cooperation, warmth, openness, caring and love for the marginalized, the powerless and the voiceless as demonstrated by the Most Holy Trinity. The reality in our world today is that our oneness is shaken to its core and is calling for a voice of reconnection, healing and hope.

As we move forward into the future, let us remember we are part of this circle, we are indeed part of this globe. *What are our future possibilities?* As Mary Ward companions, this is our kairos moment calling us to show up, to pull our own weight and take risks in order to begin something new as a family for the greater Glory of God.



Sr. Mercy Shumbamhini CJ & Sr. Jane Gikonyo IBVM



MARY WARD
A WOMAN OF OUR TIME:
CALLS US TO ONENESS

WE
are part of the
WHOLE



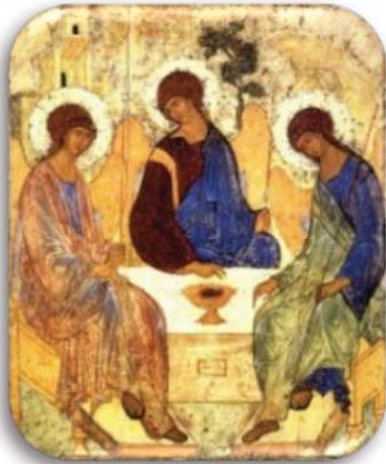
2021

Mary Ward Week

where roads meet, in order to weave new patterns together with others, for the common good.

The unification is a moment in development that begets new energies and possibilities for mission. Let us ensure that the magic of reunion does contribute to the transformation of relationships and connection between ourselves, with others and with creation. The lives of impoverished people and that of our planet clamours for action, and we, as a Body, must and will impact and make a difference. This is a huge challenge that we are called to meet head on.

With eyes fixed on Jesus of Nazareth and with ears attuned to Mary, who tells us that *"it is the hour"* to *"do what He tells you"* we feel ourselves impelled, animated, and challenged to fill the jars with the waters of hope, caring, tolerance, and eco-justice, compassion solidarity... to enable the miracle of 'new wine' that unity promises.



How can we co-create together a future
of greater possibilities?

How can we set our world on fire
and make it more human?





This same Institute is coming into its own among us in these last years. Each member stands up to be counted and claims her identity as part of this original dream of Mary Ward.



The health pandemic has highlighted the numerous other pandemics that we have learned to live with, along with the multiple disconnections among ourselves, between brothers and sisters, between creation, and with the Original Breath (Ruah). That we are part of a global village has now become crystal clear, and questions rise among us: *Will we emerge from this more human? Who will keep vigil for the women and men who are now even poorer, who will keep vigil for a devastated Mother Earth?* A complex problem

indeed... and going it alone will get us nowhere. We need the other, to be for each other, to be artisans together, with and for this one mission. Delving together into the weave of our joint history of IBVM/CJ we have discovered and borne witness to that which identifies and binds us into one: fidelity, courage, resilience, passion for our God, passion for mission, freedom, justice, and sincerity. The richness of our patrimony and congregational identity has its roots deep in the Gospel and it now behoves us to carry it forward, to recreate and bring it to life in this changed reality.

As keepers of this treasure, we must weave together a new pattern as we respond to the call for reunification and mission. This newness will evolve in our coming together, connecting, valuing gifts and talents, and through the appreciation of the practical and spiritual richness of each of our members.

The mix and blending of intercultural dialogue will most surely bring about new small beginnings that will be rich in colour and textures; that will give depth, body and substance to the whole. It will enable going forward to

INTRODUCTION

Mary Ward, a visionary and woman for all seasons, sought God in all things. *What does "all things" mean?* As Mary Ward companions, we strongly believe that this means four-fold ways: being in connection with God, self, others and creation. St Ignatius would say, 'finding God in all things' and in Mary Ward's own words, 'to refer all to God'.

We are being called to reconnect with each other in a new way. A new way of our time that symbolizes the Father-Son-Holy Spirit model.

As we reflect on union, God is calling us to form new patterns of working together in our mission today as Mary Ward companions. It is a time of coming together to share our common heritage. Together we can achieve more, as one of the African proverbs says, *"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together"*. This can only be possible in our time if we focus on synergy. Our foundress, Mary Ward, had the incredible gift of imagining possibilities and taking risks in order to begin something new. Let us put our gifts together in order to become effective evangelizers of our time, for we are all part of this circle: the circle of life that is inclusive and life giving.

COVID-19 has not only harnessed a new sense of solidarity in our world today but it has also exposed to the world the injustice of inequality. COVID-19 aggravates the exclusion and discrimination suffered by women and men, girls and boys, children, the elderly, people living with disability, members of racial and ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, refugees and migrants. Black Lives Matter has not only shifted the way we see the reality in the world, but also the way we feel - how we sense each other's well-being and pain. It has indeed opened us to a deeper human connection. We see this hour as a time for reconnecting with God, self, others and creation. God is inviting us to work together to make our world a better place for all of us, especially for the marginalized and most vulnerable in our society. Mary Ward was convinced that, *"Women in time to come will do much"* and should not be afraid to take new paths in the service of the Church, and be open and ready to respond to the signs of the times where the need is greatest, with the face of justice.

The 21st century is a time of reconnecting and building bridges, a time for union of minds and hearts, a time of transformation, and a time to co-create our future mission, in fidelity to the charism and spirituality of our foundress, the Venerable Mary Ward.

Inspired by Mary Ward's love of God, others and creation, the members of the Mary Ward family in this booklet challenge us to build right relations with the earth and all of creation for the greater honour and glory of God.



Mary Ward's deep faith in God led her to search and find God in all things, being attentive to the action of God in her daily life and enabling her to respond to God's holy will to be done in her life. She recognized clearly in prayer how important it was to have a free heart and open access to God: "referring everything to God."

She abandoned herself to God, offering her entire self to God. In the *Painted Life* no. 21, we read about the Glory Vision, a mystical experience through which she received enlightenment from God concerning the work about to be entrusted to her. From this vision, Mary Ward understood that this was God's will for her and she remained totally obedient to God's guidance.

Mary Ward's ascetical living of the gospel, especially through daily spiritual practices, led her to such a familiarity with God. That is, being attentive to the movement of the Spirit within her, and trusting in God's providence as she says, "I will give Him what I have and all that I need I will find in Him." Mary Ward trusted God in times of difficulties and uncertainties. For her, all experiences were opportunities for finding God: whether in good times or in the face of difficulties. She remained loyal to the path of life she had chosen.

Just like her, we are called to fidelity even in the most difficult times - we must continue to do good works with verity, especially in our ministries of reaching out to the needy and underprivileged in society, a call to accept certain interior and exterior uncertainties of our lives, such as now when we are thinking of the reunion of the two Mary Ward Institutes. Also, the global pandemic of COVID-19, bringing with it many forms of uncertainty, as we are already experiencing; the poor who have been stripped of their basic means of livelihood, people who have lost jobs, rising cases of teenage pregnancies and increasing cases of domestic violence, among others. With all these already happening, the post-Corona world is quite uncertain.

impact on our common home's wealth and health. As children going far away, we are called to come back *Home*, to live like a just soul, "like those in Paradise, before the first fall were in this estate." We are called to have an awakening conversion.

In *Laudato Sí* (#10), Pope Francis introduced Saint Francis as an excellent example: "He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace."

How do I see my oneness with God's creation?





Mary Ward sought and found God in all things. The Just Soul vision is one of the special graces for our way:

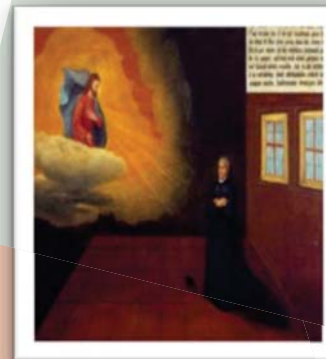
"The felicity of this estate (for as much as I can express) was a singular freedom from all that could make one adhere to earthly things, with an entire application and apt disposition to all good works. Something happened also discovering the freedom that such a soul should have had to refer all to God, but I think that was after, or upon some other occasion; however, that such a thing there was I am very certain."

(Mary Ward's letter to Father Lee – the Just Soul vision)

From this vision, as Mary Ward's companions, we are invited to recognize God's presence in our life; to live in harmony with all God's creatures and "to walk in the presence of God".

God created the world and entrusted us to care for it: "God blessed them, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth.'" (Genesis 1:28). With God's loving creation, all creatures have rights to "be fruitful" and share life. This is how we are called to nourish our relationship and commitment with ourselves, others, God and the earth. Truly, there is an inseparable connection between us and nature, as Pope Francis mentioned: "We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it." (Laudato Sí #139). However, our ways of living are causing a break to this connection. Lifestyles of greediness and selfishness lead our life to go far away from God and God's creation; they destroy healthy relationships between the life of human beings and the life of the planet and all creatures living in it. This affects the environment of the world, especially the poor, and has an

Mary Ward concretely responded to the needs of the Church and the society of her time. This maxim of Mary Ward presents us with a valuable insight to draw from. As her companions, her life is a reminder of fidelity in prayer and the continuous effort in having right relationships with others and with God, in whose providence we are able to accomplish much, doing ordinary things in an extraordinary manner. We are told that Mary Ward's first and last word was Jesus. Jesus became the keyword and the central theme throughout her life; that is, in all her petitions, refuge in all dangers and protection in all evil. She encourages us to refer all these challenges to Jesus, allowing Him to be the beginning and the end of our lives in everything.



How is referring to God a living reality in my life, family, community and ministry?

What hinders me from freeing my heart and letting God take control of my life situations?



24 January 2021

MARY WARD: A WOMAN WITH AN OPEN MIND, HEART AND WILL

Anyone who delves into the study of materials by or about Mary Ward will not be able to resist the wonder and great respect for her personality. Her enemies felt the same way about her.

In the life of the founder of a religious congregation, we can see what the Lord wants to do with each of us. Let's take a quick look at her life.

Mary Ward's "starting line" was high: She could grow up among the witnesses to the faith - parents, grandmother Ursula Wright, relatives, all the families in whom virtues were highly appreciated. In these backgrounds, she could see and experience that God was an absolute value. Faith, beautifully passed from generation to generation, resulted in a desire for martyrdom as she grew up. Mary Ward's faith was truly a personal relationship - a love of God. She lived this relationship and relatively soon - aged about 12 - was able to independently discern God's will and carry it out.

She recognized God's heart. Her great, loving effort to know and fulfil God's will was firm, enduring, and even growing throughout her life. In Mary Ward, we see the powerful guidance of the Holy Spirit, that is given to those who are pure, free, uninterested in themselves.

Focusing on God - that's where everything comes from! By co-operating with God's grace,



Where is your Well?

Who do you bless?

Who blesses you?

Where is your Upper Room?



Considering how in the midst of the Covid-19 Pandemic, a 'circle of friends' might look now - and from now on - we need only to look at that critical time and "the lemon juice letters". They kept Mary Ward's circle of friends steadfast in their determination to keep the Institute alive and together.

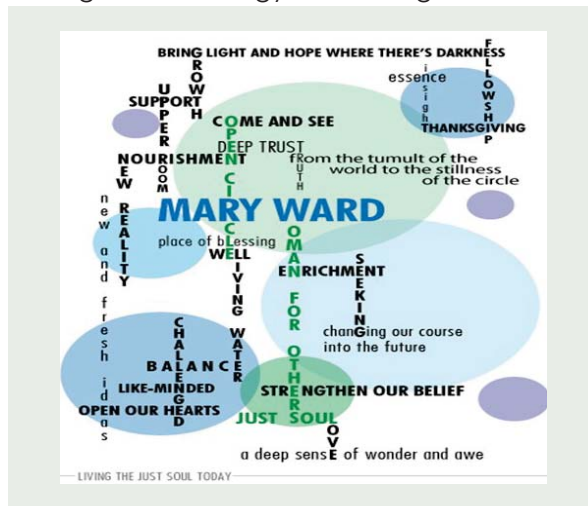
Physical distancing or isolation cannot be a deterrent to continue living our dream. Technology has opened new and resourceful ways of keeping us connected 'together'. Our *Mary Ward Open Circle* of the 21st Century is a space where we meet and share ideas, make plans and strengthen each other.

What holds you back from investing in
a 'circle of friends' (MWOC)?



The painting of Mary Ward and her first companions (PL 22), at first glance, shows women of common interest gathered together. But this image goes beyond togetherness, as the open circle they have formed beckons one to 'come and see'. Mary Ward's open circle invitation and the impact of her life and spirituality leave a deep sense of wonder and awe, an unease/dis-ease, like a 'what if' feeling. The purpose of Mary Ward Open Circle (MWOC) is to embrace and embody her vision and values in today's world. Our call is to be, as Mary Ward said, "wholly God's", "to be strong and apt for all such good works as are in this world to be done" (MW Retreat notes 1619).

Reflecting on an 'open circle', one imagines a place of companionship of like-minded people that is welcoming, open to others with new and fresh ideas that add and enrich this circle and that challenges us to 'see beyond' - where the meetings/gatherings are like a WELL where we come for nourishment, for support and companionship, where we are challenged and enriched, where we can relax and be refreshed and blessed as we go about our various activities/ministries. It is like an Upper Room where we can celebrate, can be ourselves – a place of confidence, challenge, trust, energy and strength.



we can experience the safe guidance of the Holy Spirit as well, and become ever better instruments in God's hand. It was very important to Mary Ward. Her life was deeply permeated with prayer and a strong connection with God, and this made her able to be so stable, firm, unshaken in all struggles. With an open heart for God's will, rooted in it, she could wait and act. What radiated from her had the same effect on people as her actions.

Each one of us has gifts, in the same way as every family, community or Province/Region. We are a living organism, responding to the needs of the times. Just realize that the individual parts complement each other!



How am I aware of that?

What do I have to leave in order to accept something new?



Mary Ward saw a clear vision about a new active religious life for women, which was beyond her original desire for conventional religious life, and much beyond the general ideas of the time. Here, she is somehow in line with Paul, the apostle. After his encounter with Jesus, the risen Lord, Paul went in a totally different direction from his previous belief of salvation through the laws of God, and proclaimed the grace of God that made space for the Gentiles in the Church. Mary Ward, on the other hand, worked to open a new chapter for women in the male-centred Church so that women can have a voice and serve actively out in the world. Although in Mary Ward's time, unlike the early Church, the Church was firmly institutionalised and her request was not easily accepted, her mission did not cease and she started many schools and communities across Europe.

She invites us to do the same today – not giving up before the uncertainty of the world but letting God take us beyond our limits and do more for Christ. This relates to the principle “time is greater than space” that Pope Francis talks about in *Evangelii Gaudium*. No. 223 says, “This principle enables us to work slowly but surely, without being obsessed with immediate results. It helps us patiently to endure difficult and adverse situations, or inevitable changes in our plans. ... What we need, then, is to give priority to actions which generate new processes in society and engage other persons and groups who can develop them to the point where they bear fruit in significant historical events.” This perfectly explains how Mary Ward had no boundaries in her mission and continued despite the opposition – she believed in God's time.

Today's world is experiencing dramatic changes in lifestyle due to the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. Now, with the increased restrictions in many areas of life and travel, it might give us a new insight into our identity as “pilgrim” when we look again at Mary Ward's life as a pilgrim. Things change in their forms and character with the time, but not in the true essence. She teaches us to live in God's time, to reach out to the

As Mary Ward family, God is inviting us in oneness to serve others for his greater glory. We need to make our hands dirty by getting into contact with God's people right on their turf. We are challenged to go beyond structural boundaries so as to reach out to everyone, without segregation. Indeed the joy and hope and grief and anguish of the men and women of our time especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way, should be the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well (cf. Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, no 1). We are consecrated women, friends and companions sent to be the prophetic voice and sign of God. May the example of Mary Ward help us to be channels of hope and vehicles of oneness in the love we have for Christ and the universal Church.

What are we called to do together
for the good of the Church?

How can we apply our Catholic faith
to the critical issues of our time?

How can our faith bear the smell of the sheep?



27 January 2021

MARY WARD: A WOMAN FOR THE CHURCH

Mary Ward burned with the desire to give faith to people. She was a true symbol for the Church by bringing hope in hopeless situations. In September 1609, while in England, she engaged in helping souls: preparing people for the sacraments and tending the sick, of which the saint of our time, Padre Pio of

Pietrelcina once said, "Jesus Christ is twice present in the poor and the sick". Mary Ward assisted priests in hiding to administer the sacraments. She enthusiastically taught catechism during persecution of the Church in England. Mary Ward's life offers us a sure spiritual model to emulate. Just like our Blessed Virgin Mary who proclaimed the greatness of the Lord in her Magnificat, Mary Ward also expressed her Magnificat by bringing and living the Gospel of hope in the way she loved the Church.



Mary Ward remained faithful to her mission in the love of Christ. In our time today we are being invited by the Lord to restore hope like Mary Ward, to the hopeless, the persecuted, the sick, especially those affected by coronavirus, the marginalized, migrants and refugees. It is for this reason that Saint Theresa of Calcutta once remarked that Mary Ward was God's gift to the Church and society. As followers of Mary Ward, we cannot and should not shy away from critical issues of our time: fighting disease, fight against racism, protecting our 'common home', reaching out to trafficked people, orphans, the hungry and the dying. This is one outstanding virtue of Mary Ward: preaching through love in action not just word. Indeed, Mary Ward walked the talk.

people who are marginalized and isolated from the light of Jesus, and make our Church embrace them. We, Mary Ward Family, will keep on in this pilgrim life to wherever the need is greater, for the glory of God. *Then how are we going to take that pilgrimage, and to where?* "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." – Gal 3:28.

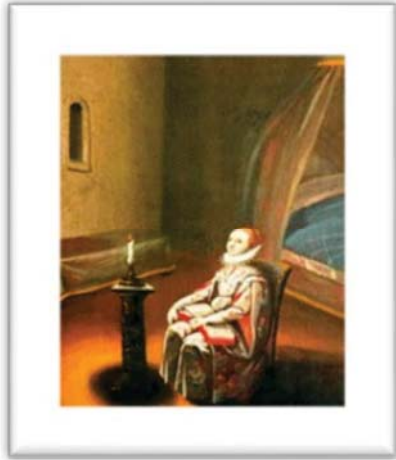
What does the motto,
"ad maiorem Dei gloriam" (AMDG), "for the
greater glory of God" mean to me?

How do I see our Mary Ward Family
doing more for Christ and living the Magis as
contemplatives in action?





MARY WARD: A WOMAN OF SINCERITY IN HER LIFE AND MISSION



Throughout Mary Ward's life, verity, sincerity, integrity were very critical. Mary Ward always put integrity as her first priority. She refused all tricks when she could have accepted another rule for her Institute, with a view to adapting it later. A life of integrity is one of sincerity, without masks or pretence. Sincerity is being in touch with the depths of our heart where the Holy Spirit dwells. It was through continual prayer that Mary Ward found the courage to be faithful to her convictions. We have as our inspiration and inheritance the charism of Mary

Ward, a deep relationship with Jesus and the ability to be in tune with God through prayer and reflection. Mary Ward waited on God with inner freedom and fidelity. She invites us to *"be such as we appear and appear such as we are"* in our life and different works. She also challenges her followers to *"become lovers of truth and workers of justice."*

What challenge does this present to the dynamics of our cultures in our time? What challenge does this offer to our society where there is inequality, injustice, racism, hunger, corruption, poverty, greedy, Covid-19 pandemic, environmental destruction, etc? Mary Ward made a huge difference in her time, what about us today?

One of her key phrases is that *"we do good and we do it well"*. We are invited to do ordinary things on a daily basis with all our heart for the greater glory of God. I feel Mary Ward is challenging us to be real with God, with self, others and all creatures. Here in Zimbabwe, in my work with orphaned children and children living with HIV/AIDs, I see a lot of suffering through hunger and lack of medication. At the moment during this lockdown, most of these children have no access to education. There is a

call for self-sacrifice, commitment, collaboration in the global village, full engagement, dialogue, advocacy, consultation from specialists and embracing information and communications technology (ICT). We need to work as one family with the intercession of Mary Ward. Venerable Mary Ward, pray for us and give your spirit.

For Mary Ward, verity, sincerity and integrity all speak of wholeness, whole heartedness, truthfulness. We need to continuously ask ourselves:

What challenge does this present to me?

What does this ask of us as Mary Ward Family living in the 21st century?

